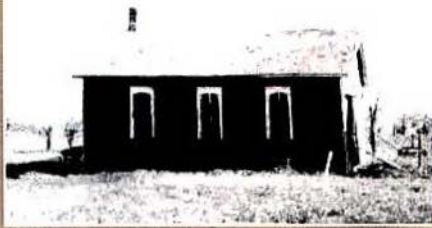


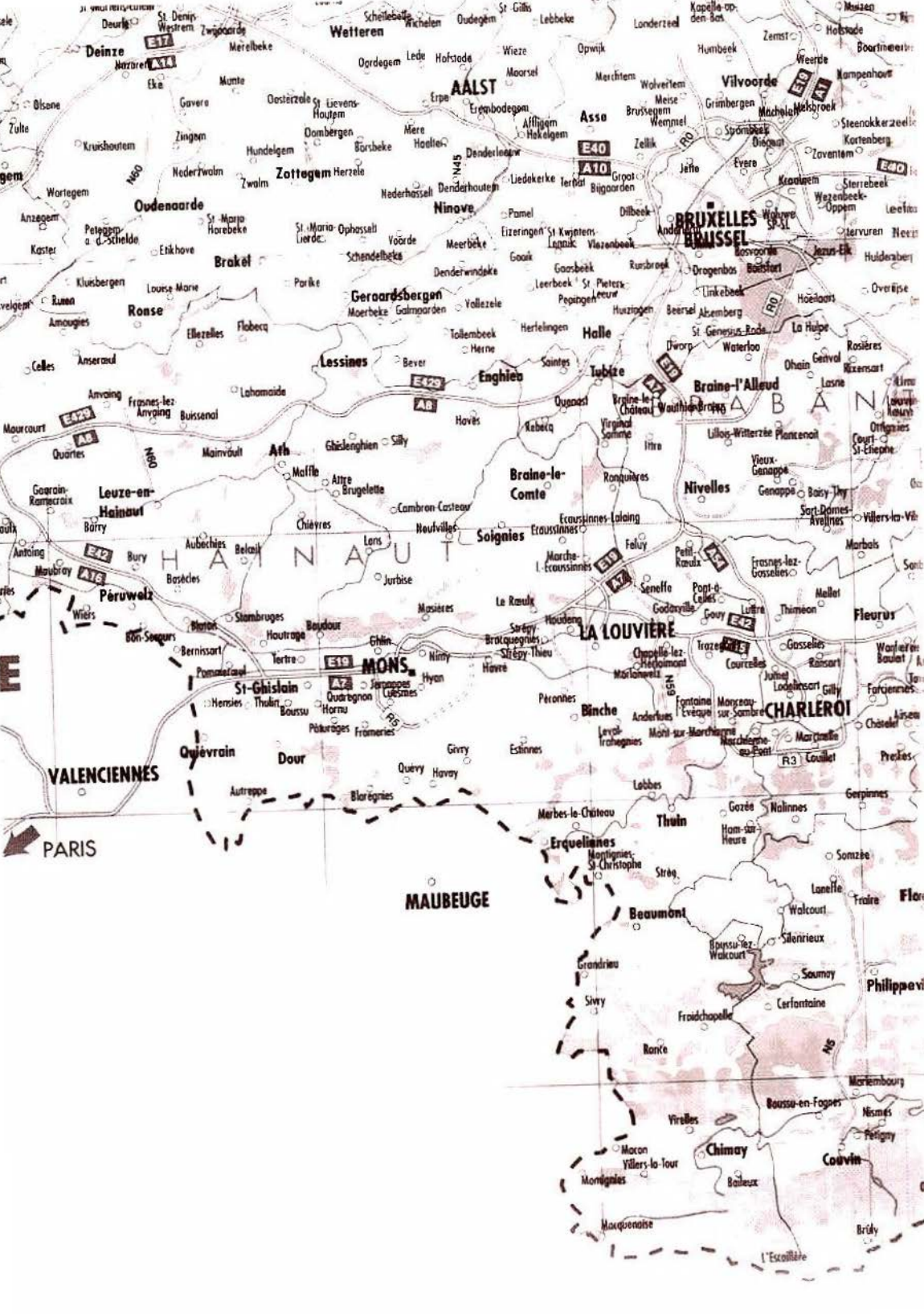
The History of the Belgian Settlements

in Door, Kewaunee
& Brown Counties



...A Legacy
in Ten Parts

by Math S. Tlachac



The History of the Belgian Settlements

**in Door, Kewaunee
and Brown Counties**

Reprinted from series of articles which appeared in
the Algoma Record-Herald.

**... A LEGACY
IN 10 PARTS**

By Math S. Tlachac

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Only 10 minutes before he died, my father reviewed with me a folder containing 10 articles which he had researched and written on “The history of the Belgian Settlements in Door, Kewaunee and Brown Counties.”

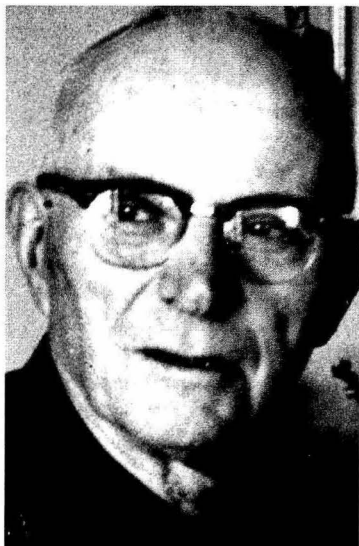
My brothers, Norman and Norbert Tlachac, and myself greatly appreciate the fact that the Algoma Record-Herald has agreed to publish these articles posthumously. I think the greatest tribute we could give to our father, Math Tlachac, is to say that we needed no commandment advising us to “Honor thy father.” For our love and respect for Dad began about the time we realized who our father was.

He was a hardy man, made of the same self-reliant essence of these Belgian emigrants of whom he writes. It is true, death ravaged his body, but Dad’s immortal spirit, that immaterial part of him with his ideas about patriotism and truth, which no one could see or touch, lives on. He took an almost fierce pride in the humble peasant ancestry of both our Bohemian and Belgian fore bearers and left his family the priceless heritage of a genealogy second to none. In his research back into the centuries, Dad sought and revealed the truths which motivated his ancestors to seek more God-fearing and self-fulfilling lives.

In his funeral liturgy, the family requested as a closing song, “The Battle Hymn of the Republic.” We feel Dad’s “truth is marching on” through the publication of these articles. For:

*“His burning soul
Had but an hour of breath
To build a ship of Truth
In which his soul might sail . . .
For death took toll
Of strength, courage, youth,
Of all . . . but Truth.”*

~ Sister Mary Audri Tlachac, O.S.F.



MATH S. TLACHAC

THE AUTHOR

(ALGOMA RECORD-HERALD PHOTO)

PART I

FOUR GENERATIONS OF BELGIAN PEOPLE HAVE LIVED AND TOILED IN AREA; ONCE THERE WERE A FEW WHO REMEMBERED EARLY DAYS.

Between Green Bay and Sturgeon Bay is a region along the bay which is populated almost exclusively by people of Belgian origin. It is the largest rural settlement of people of this nationality in the United States and covers an area 20 miles wide and 50 miles long.

Four generations of Belgian people have lived and toiled there since this land was reclaimed from the wilderness and up to three decades ago there were a few old men and women who remembered how this region appeared when they and their parents penetrated into the vast primeval forest to start a new life.

The following is a history of the Belgian settlement as obtained by research and what elder Belgians have said about the development of the area which they occupied. Some history is also included specifically about the Township of Brussels, which is the region of my birth.

The first Belgian known to penetrate this region was Father Louis Hennepin, a missionary who was born in Ath in the province of Hainaut, Belgium.

He came to America in 1675 and took a prominent part in exploring this region.

As he traveled by canoe on the waters of Green Bay, he stopped at a site where the Village of Dyckesville now stands.. Following a long tiresome day of paddling, he and his party decided to camp over night, little dreaming that his campsite was later to become the largest settlement of his countrymen in America. Upon recall to his native country, not a Belgian set foot in this region for almost 175 years.

Began in 1853

In order to better understand what motivated the Belgians to leave their mother country for the New World, we must turn back the pages of time to the year, 1853. We are in the province of Brabant, which is located in the center of Belgium from which

the first emigrants came. It was a crowded and thickly populated area.

In the early part of 1853, a small farmer by the name of Constant J. Petiniot from the commune of "Greze-Doiceau" made a trip to the City of Antwerp to transact business.

Upon reaching his destination Petiniot was thirsty and sought an inn. Stopping in, he ordered a glass of beer to quench his thirst. While sitting at a table sipping his beer, he spied a pamphlet on another table nearby. He picked up the pamphlet and saw that it was printed in the Dutch language.

Belgian is not a printed language but Petiniot was able to read some Dutch. While reading the pamphlet, he became extremely interested in what it said. It told of the fertile land in America which stretched for hundreds of miles with no one living on it; all of this land was awaiting the settlement of the white man.

And when Petiniot read that this land could be purchased from the American government for \$1.25 an acre, his interest was aroused to a high pitch. To own land, to cultivate it, plant it and reap the harvest for himself was the most coveted hope of most every European peasant for centuries. To get a share of this rich land in America became the dominant hope of most rural Europeans who heard about it.

Then he folded the pamphlet and tucked it into his pocket.

Desire Is Implanted

Upon completing his business affairs in Antwerp, Petiniot headed for home filled with a burning desire to eventually own some of the cheap land in America. His small farm in Belgium consisted of four or five hectare. (One hectare equals 2.471 acres). In the New World he could obtain a hundred times as much land for

the price of his few hectare in Belgium.

The more Petiniot thought about it, the more convinced he became that he should emigrate to America where opportunities seemed better. He felt that here, indeed, was something to think and talk about when he reached home. Several times on his homeward journey he drew the pamphlet from his pocket and read it over to make sure he understood it correctly.

When he reached home, Petiniot said nothing for a day or two but the thought of cheap land in America haunted him, making him somewhat nervous and restless, noticeable to his wife.

Said she, "What is it, Constant, that seems to make you so nervous and restless? What can it be, please tell me, I have never seen you like that before."

He replied, "My dear Madam, you will not believe what I read and heard when I was in Antwerp." Then he showed her the pamphlet and told her what it contained. He told her about the opportunities there were in America, about the cheap land which could be obtained for \$1.25 an acre. Said he, "There we can have a big farm and become rich." Would you consider emigrating to the New World?"

Madam Petiniot shrugged her shoulders, indicating she was in doubt.

Soon Petiniot spread the word amongst his neighbors in the commune of "Grez-Doiceau" and it became the subject of discussion. Within a few days some were talking about the advisability of emigrating to America.

Farmers Sought

At this time in history, our own State of Wisconsin was advertising the opportunities settlers would enjoy by locating here. Emigrants from Belgium were welcome in Wisconsin since they were people of the soil and would make good citizens. They were the kind of people America needed to develop agriculture, then the chief industry.

In the 1850's the state maintained a salaried person in New York called an "Immigration Official" whose duty it was to advertise extensively in the foreign language press of Europe and help new arrivals to their destination. He sent quantities of such printed material consisting of pam-

phlets, posters, booklets and any other printed material that would draw the attention of prospective immigrants.

One of the posters read, "Come! In Wisconsin all men are free and equal before the law. Religion is free and equal between church and state. Opportunities are unlimited for those who want to work. Good land can be purchased from the generous American government for \$1.25 an acre. The soil is adapted to raising corn, wheat, rye, oats, barley and vegetables – all products with which the Belgian husbandman is familiar."

Thousands of such posters were distributed among rural people who up to this time were undecided about emigrating. Similar advertising material was sent to those countries where political disturbances, economic conditions or religious differences compelled people to leave the land of their forefathers. It was the cheap land in America that drew them like a magnet to the New World.

Popular Subject

All one could hear in the commune of "Grez-Doiceau" was talk of America, the cheap land, the opportunity of the New World and freedom which it offered to newcomers.

Within a few weeks, neighbors gathered at Petiniot's house to learn more about the advisability of emigrating. Said he, "Here in Belgium we are crowded, our farms consist of only a few hectare which hardly produce enough for our sustenance, especially in a time of crop failure. Most best lands are owned by land lords who have little concern about the well being of those who work their lands. Besides, land is expensive here making it impossible for ordinary people to own any of it.

"Opportunity for our children is limited in a crowded country like ours, while in America we can enjoy the wide open spaces. They say that after a few years one can become a citizen in America and VOTE. Just think of it – we can "Vote" in America – while here we do not have anything to say about our government. Our sons are often called to fight a war which we did not start."

In spite of Petiniot's arguments, some

shook their head and asked, "Is the information in the pamphlet reliable or is it a snare set forth to catch the foolish and credulous?"

However to many of his neighbors, Petinot's arguments were convincing enough to cause them to decide to emigrate to America, leaving their home land where human roots went down deep into the land of their forefathers.

These Belgians sold their homes and land and with the proceeds took a chance on fortune's gifts in America. Besides Constant J. PETINIOT, widower (Grez) they were: Lambert BODART, wife, daughter, and his widowed mother, Jeanne LAMBEAU (Grez); Etienne DETIENNE, wife, and 2 children (Biez); Jean J. DOYEN, wife and 5 children (Heze); Jean Francois HANNON, wife, and 4 children (Bonlez); Philippe HANNON, wife, and 3 children (Royenne); Guillaume HORKMAN, wife, and daughter (St. Joris-Weert); Jean Baptiste MARICQ, wife, and 4 children (Ba-

yarmont); Joseph MARTIN, wife and 6 children (Doiceau); Jean Baptiste MASSY, wife, and 3 children (Doiceau); Joseph MOREAU, wife and 2 daughters (Doiceau); Martin PAQUES, wife, and 4 children (Doiceau); Gaspart RENGLET, wife, and 2 children Jean Baptist SWILLE, wife, and 5 children (Grez); Jean Baptiste DETIENNE (Biez); Louis GASTUCHE (Doiceau); Joseph HAULOTTE (Bonlez); Joseph J. HUISDENS; Joseph D. HUISDENS, brother of J.J.; Marie HUISDENS, sister of J.J. and J.D.; Jean Joseph JOSSART (Royenne); Adrien MASSY (Doiceau); Benoni NELIS (Biez); Francois Constant PETINIOT- son of Constant J. (Grez); Pierre VANDENBOSCH (St. Joris-Weert). There were a total of 81 Belgians on the Quinneberg with 13 families and 13 single people.

By leaving their homeland they became the predecessors of more than 15,000 Belgians who came the following 10 years.



Holy Name Church, Bay Settlement
(Named by Father Daems)

PART II

THE ANTWERP DEPARTURE: SEARCH FOR LAND IN A STRANGE, NEW LAND, FIRST REACH MILWAUKEE, TRY SHEBOYGAN, THEN HEAD FOR GREEN BAY.

In last week's article we told how Constant Petiniot influenced many of his neighbors to join him to emigrate to the New World. With the proceeds from the sale of their little farms and personal property, they went to the nearest town to find out what they must do and what preparations were necessary for them to leave their country.

They learned that a sailing vessel, the "Quinnebaug," was scheduled to sail from the port of Antwerp about the middle of May and that the fare to America was \$35 for each person above 12 years of age. They also learned that it was necessary to obtain a birth certificate, an emigration permit and a passport. Besides these, it was necessary to bring their own bedding and provisions to last for at least six weeks.

Then followed a busy time of baking, sewing and packing for the long journey. Each person had to go to his parish to obtain a birth certificate which showed the date of his birth, his sponsors at baptism, his parentage and other pertinent information. In the case of a married woman, her maiden name was also required to appear on the certificate. Birth certificates in those days were very complete and much in detail.

Next it was necessary to obtain an Emigration Permit. For this the emigrant had to go to the local court where a government deputy was authorized to issue such forms. The emigration permit stated the point of destination with a request that all authorities were to grant the bearer free passage and even help him if necessary.

Next was the government passport which was also obtained in the local court from a government deputy. On the passport appeared the location of the birth of the emigrant, the date, religion, stature, facial features, color of hair and eyes. Finally, he

was required to sign the passport in the presence of the deputy.

Say Farewells

As the time approached to leave home, friends and relatives were visited perhaps for the last time. Provisions, clothing and other necessary items needed for such a sea voyage were carefully packed in a large trunk to be taken on board the vessel. No doubt there must have been a feeling of sadness and misgiving as they bid farewell and headed into a future that was unknown. It took a strong determination and a stout heart to make the break.

At the time there were four ports of embarkation from Europe. They were Bremen and Hamburg in Germany, LeHavre in France and Antwerp in Belgium. Since the "Quinnebaug" was anchored in the harbor at Antwerp, Petiniot and his party headed for Antwerp.

The largest exodus of European emigrants to the United States occurred between the years 1853 and the breaking out of the Civil War in 1860. Ship companies took advantage of this and for them it was a lucrative business. These ship companies made it a business of transporting emigrants to lands beyond the sea. They made it easy and simple to travel. All the emigrant had to do was to tell them where he was bound for and they saw to it that he reached his destination.

One of the largest of such ship companies at that time was the S.H.P. Schroder line with a fleet of sailing vessels that made scheduled trips to and from Europe and America. It maintained ship company offices in Europe as well as in America.

As Petiniot and his fellow countrymen reached Antwerp, these inland Belgians saw for the first time the waters of the English channel. They hardly realized that so much water existed in the world. They saw their ship, the Quinnebaug, with its three

masts anchored in the harbor.

The wharf was buzzing with activity as other emigrants were boarding the vessel with their trunks. One passenger, with the help of others, was struggling to load two millstones which he intended to use to grind wheat in a flour mill that he hoped to erect when he reached his destination.

Passenger tickets were obtained in the ship company office and the passenger had to show his passport to make sure no one was trying to board the boat as a stowaway.

At last Petiniot and his party boarded the ship. On May 18, 1953, the vessel sails were hoisted and the creaking ship slowly moved out of the harbor, making its way into the North Sea. As it did so, men, women and children stood on deck watching the receding shore line, some with heavy hearts at the thought of leaving the home of their birth. Women asked for Divine guidance for a safe trip to parts unknown.

Voyage Long, Dull

As the vessel left the English channel, it sailed into the broad, deep blue Atlantic ocean. The passengers settled down to a long, dull voyage and there were very few comforts as compared to sea travel today.

Day after day the vessel sailed on and many days the trip was very rough due to storms. Once they thought their last hour had come when one of the ship's three masts was snapped off and carried away by the fierce Atlantic wind. But the ship tossed, swayed and creaked onward over the endless ocean for seven weeks. During the last week, there was actual hunger for most of the passengers ran out of food and drinking water was insufficient.

During the ocean voyage, the Belgians made acquaintance with a party of Dutch emigrants who were on board the ship and who, like themselves, read the pamphlet and had been persuaded by it to emigrate to America. The Belgian families had no particular destination in mind when they left home and on the ocean they decided to accompany the Hollanders to Wisconsin, wherever that was.

At last they reached the port of New York.

There was no Ellis Island to process

them: it did not come until later years. There was no Statue of Liberty holding a torch in an outstretched hand to welcome new arrivals to the land of freedom. It was not to be erected until some 30 years later.

At last the passengers walked the gang plank onto dry ground; they could hardly believe that they had crossed three thousand miles of ocean.

Reach Wisconsin

Leaving New York after an interminable journey on canal boats and lake steamers, they eventually reached Milwaukee, full of amazement that the world was so large. The Hollanders were bound for an area near the present city of Sheboygan where they had some friends and acquaintances. Petiniot and his party decided to follow them.

Here, however, they found out that friends and acquaintances of the Hollanders had staked out land claims for them ahead of time. Only the poorer lands were left available for the Belgians.

Furthermore, the Belgians found themselves among people with whom they could not converse on account of the difference in language. It dismayed them and some of them then spoke of returning to Belgium but were unable to do so on account of a lack of funds.

While in their dilemma, they met with a French-Canadian who told them that in Green Bay nearly half of the population spoke French. He also assured them that the soil, timber, water and climate were just as good as that around Sheboygan.

The Belgians were greatly relieved by this information and their spirits rose. They headed for Green Bay immediately and to them it was like coming home when they heard the French language which was not strange to them. Friendship was easily made in this strange new country. They were told by some of the French settlers in Green Bay that there was good land to be had around the present city of Kaukauna. Leaving their families in Green Bay, the men went out prospecting for land. After several days of prospecting, they finally decided to stake their claim in an area 20 miles south of Green Bay. They entered their claim in the land office in Menasha,

well satisfied with their selection, after which they headed back to Green Bay to move their families to what was to be their new home.

At last they were going to be possessors

of that cheap American land which they had heard so much about. But upon their return to Green Bay, an event occurred which was to completely change their plans.



An Historic Stone House,
Bay Settlement

The Petiniot
Farmhouse,
Still Standing



PART III

DEATH DELAYS EMIGRANTS, AND BAY SETTLEMENT IS CHOSEN; FIRST WINTER HARD; CHOLERA STRIKES.

The incident mentioned in the last installment and one that changed the plans of the Belgian emigrants was that the sickly five-year-old son of Philippe Hannon died the day before the return of the men who had been prospecting for land in the region of present City of Kaukauna.

Preparations for the burial were necessary. This delayed the departure of the emigrants for a few days but was the means which determined the location of the eventual settlement of 20,000 Belgians now living in Brown, Kewaunee and Door counties. Without this happening, they might be living in the Kaukauna area.

On the day of the boy's funeral, the local officiating priest was visited by his friend, Father Edward Daems, who was the pastor of the last frontier settlement in north-eastern Wisconsin. It was known as Bay Settlement, some 10 miles northeast of Green Bay and overlooking the bay.

Father Daems was elated in meeting his countrymen. He was a friendly young man, energetic and full of enthusiasm for his work and for the new country. To the homesick Belgians, it was like meeting a lost brother. The Belgian language was music to their ears and they crowded around him as if he was arisen from the dead.

They told him of their decision to settle 20 miles south of Green Bay, but to this he would not listen. He told them they were the kind of people he would like to have in his congregation because they were religious.

Said Father Daems, "You must come and see my parish and lands surrounding it first. There are many French-speaking people. The soil is of excellent quality for farming."

He further told them, "I will go along with you to assist you to find good land and good places to settle. You can attend Mass and partake of the sacraments and attend worship in your own language."

What convincing words these were, coming from the lips of one of their own nationality in a strange world.

Follow Advice

The prospect of assisting at Mass and being able to partake of the sacraments was especially convincing to the women who thought they ought to follow Father Daem's advice and follow him to Bay Settlement. The group held a conference and decided in favor of it.

Relinquishing their claims for land in the Kaukauna area, the group set out for Bay Settlement. The priest set out with his horse and buckboard while they, headed by Petiniot, followed on foot along the 10 mile winding road to Bay Settlement. There they rested and were fed by Father Daems, who also cared for them. After two days of rest the men, accompanied by the priest and a guide, started out prospecting for good land which they could develop into fine farms.

They certainly chose wisely when they staked out land claims some 10 miles northeast of Bay Settlement beyond the last log cabin in an area we know as Robinsonville, four miles south of Dyckesville.

Today the land is all deforested and the rich black loam soil, devoid of stones, testifies to their ability to choose good land. The Belgians called this place "Aux premiers Belges."

Now for certain they had at last come into possession of some of the cheap land in America which they so much coveted.

Now came the task of moving their families to the newly acquired land. Fortified with an ax and a few simple tools, the settlers immediately fell to the difficult task of cutting down the trees to make space large enough so that they could construct temporary homes until better ones could be built. Some of the homes were only three-sided huts with something like a thatched roof made of branches, just enough to pro-

tect them against the inclement weather.

The place they selected for their home lay many miles in a deep primeval forest where hardly a ray of sunshine could filter thru the foliage of the pine, hemlock and hardwood which grew there.

"At least we do not have to ask some authority to cut down a tree," they said, and there is enough timber to construct the buildings we need."

They saw more Indians than white men and for a time they were fearful of their scalps. However, they found the Potawatomi Indians to be friendly and although they could not speak to them, by smiles and gestures they assured each other of their kindest feelings.

In the work of cutting down the trees and building homes, the men were assisted by the women. These Belgian women were very strong and did not mind hard work in the least. The very fact that they owned the land gave them enthusiasm to help clear it.

In time, the pioneers had cleared a few acres and were looking around for oxen with which to plow among the stumps. Previously, the ground between the stumps was dug up with a grub hoe to prepare it for seeding wheat. They were well aware that bread was the staff of life, hence they sowed as much wheat as their patches of ground would permit.

Endured Rugged Winter

The first winter was a rugged one for these pioneers but good health, and plenty of game for food made the first Belgians well content in their primitive homes.

Towards spring the Indians initiated them into the mystery of tapping maple trees and making maple syrup and sugar out of the sap. They also taught them how to snare wild animals, such as bear and deer, which would provide the settlers with meat. In addition, the Indians taught them how to smoke meat for preserving quality.

On Sunday these Belgian pioneers grouped together dressed in homespun clothing with "sabots" (wooden shoes) on their feet and made the long 10-mile trip to Bay Settlement to hear Mass. They liked to hear Father Daems speak in their native language when making his sermon to the

parishioners. It reminded them of their home in Belgium.

About once a year, letters were exchanged with relatives and friends left behind in Belgium. These early settlers described the new country in glowing terms and optimism. Their glowing letters to relatives and friends in Belgium were perhaps due to a desire to justify their judgment among the home people, for many of the latter shook their heads disapprovingly when the first emigrants had left their old neighborhood to seek a new life in an unknown land.

The letters also said that a kind nature and a liberal government had provided all that is necessary. The soil was marvelous, the game abundant, the climate was excellent – all one needed to get rich was two willing hands. The letters opened dazzling prospects to new comers.

Tragedy Strikes

In Belgium such letters were passed from one to another person and also read by hundreds, for emigration to America was still such a new idea that it seemed a wonderful thing to hear. Many of those able to, departed at once for a new country full of pleasant anticipation.

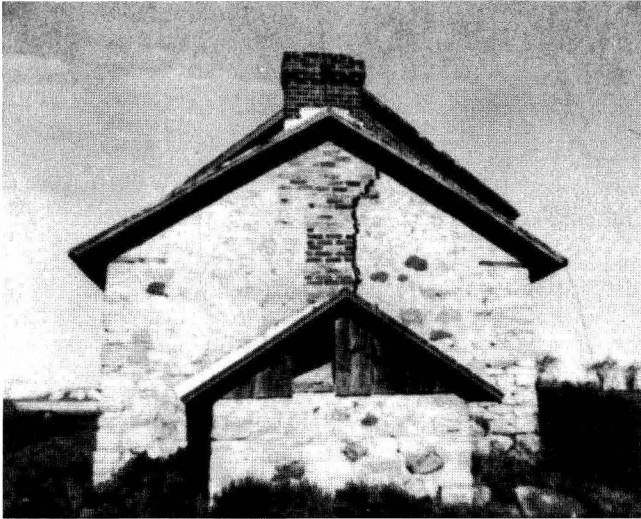
In the fall of 1854, many emigrants came and every little log house in Bay Settlement and in Aux premiers Belges was filled with new arrivals. Here they were joyfully received and news from home was eagerly sought by the first settlers. It was a grand pleasure to be again united with relatives and friends after a long separation.

But alas! Some of these new arrivals brought along germs of Asiatic cholera and in a short time many of the forest cabins were filled with sick people. One after another died. It was a sudden disease for which there was no cure and no doctor whom they could call. Strong men who were well the day before were found dead in the morning.

Father Daems, although he knew considerable about medicine, could not come often because his congregation by this time had extended so far into districts not yet accessible to wheeled traffic. He could

attend only a few of the burials and consequently most of the victims were attended by close relatives and were buried in the

woods without the rites of the church. It was, indeed, a sad and anxious time for the Belgian pioneers.



THIS EARLY OUTDOOR OVEN, located on the former August LuMaye property at Rosiere, is now owned by George Wautlet. The homes of early Belgian settlers were heated by stoves which had no ovens and for this reason outdoor ones were constructed. Constructed of handmade brick, they resembled large fireplaces. Prior to baking, a fire was made in the oven and kept going until bricks were red-hot. Then as many as a dozen loaves of bread were baked at one time. They came out of the oven "crusted a golden brown and as light as a feather," to quote the late Math S. Tlachac. Mr. Tlachac took the picture.

PART IV

LETTERS FROM AMERICA DRAW MORE; DESPITE HARDSHIPS, MANY NEW FAMILIES IN 1856-1857; LONELINESS, WILDERNESS ENGULF THEM.

The news of the pestilence among the Belgians in America did not reach their homeland in Belgium for several months. In the meantime, thousands of other Belgians were preparing to emigrate. The contents of the letters received from those already settled in Wisconsin were passed by word of mouth from one to another.

However, many of those who wanted to emigrate were cotters living on the estates of large landowners and in humble circumstances and for that reason were not able to depart so quickly. They made their living chiefly by working in the harvest fields of the landlords by threshing the grain with a flail.

For cutting, binding the grain and hauling it, the landlord allowed the worker every 20th shock. For other work on these large land estates, the owner paid them a few francs in money.

How alluring was the prospect of becoming independent land owners in America and keeping the entire crop for themselves! To get a share of these riches in America became a dominant desire to all who read the wonderful letters.

To most of these cotters with meager income, it was a difficult undertaking to save enough money to purchase a ticket for the family and lay something aside until they could make a living in America. Many of them found it impossible and in a deep disappointment resigned themselves to a life of drudgery with the flail.

Others proceeded with a system of pinching and saving until enough was saved to make the voyage.

In the meantime, came rumors of the cholera epidemic which was raging among their friends and relatives who already were in America. The rumor discouraged many – but then many of them said such sickness and pestilence were common in other countries too, and since the rumor

was over a year old, chances were the epidemic had subsided.

The more determined Belgians continued their preparations. By the spring of 1856 most of them were ready to sail. Thousands of Belgians from the province of Brabant departed to start a new life in the Wisconsin backwoods

Disastrous Voyages

That spring was very stormy with high winds and for many of the emigrants of 1856 the venture was a disastrous one. One vessel with its cargo of emigrants was wrecked at sea and all persons perished. Dysentery broke out on the ship, “David Otley,” and 60 persons out of 200 on board died and were buried at sea. A third vessel, the “Lacedemon” was also crippled and had to return to port for repairs.

Meanwhile, while waiting for the repairs, many of the emigrants had to spend their meager funds for food and provisions so that when they did finally reach Wisconsin, they were penniless. Here they took up lands which were remaining in northeast Brown county, and spread over several neighboring townships of Union, Brussels and Gardner in Door county as well as in parts of Kewaunee county.

But these immigrants were penniless and discouraged and letters they sent back home were of a different tone. They told of the disappointments they found here, they poured out their homesick longings, and many would have returned to their homeland were it not for lack of funds.

While not all the emigrants were disappointed, the report of many of them was so gloomy that few were tempted to follow them to the New World. However, there was quite a large migration in 1857 due to the fact that these gloomy reports from the migrants of 1856 had not reached them before they set sail. When the news did finally reach them and was fully confirmed, emi-

gration from the rural districts in Belgium ended almost abruptly.

By this time there were thousands of Belgian immigrants here although few more came until the Civil War started in the United States in 1860.

Describes Trip

Among the passengers aboard the "Lacedemon" was one Ferdinand Delveaux who came with his son, Constant, in 1856. The latter died in the Township of Brussels in 1923 at the ripe age of 93 years. Both were born in Grez-Doiceau, province of Brabant in Belgium.

It was the son, Francois Constant, who left a report of their trip to America and settlement here. He said they left the port of Antwerp March 18, 1856, after a two-day wait. Their ship, the "Lacedemon," headed out into the deep blue Atlantic ocean with nothing before their eyes except 3,000 miles of water. When about 10 miles out, they encountered a savage storm which snapped off the greater part of the main mast. It was necessary for them to return home for repairs which took 23 days, after which they started out again.

This time they had smooth sailing and arrived in the port of Quebec in Canada on May 12 after a 19-day voyage. There they transferred to a smaller boat on the St. Lawrence river which took them to Montreal. Again transferring to still another boat that took them to Toronto, they boarded railroad cars which took them as far as Lake Michigan.

From there they sailed to Green Bay where they heard the French language which made them feel like home. French and Belgian residents in Green Bay eagerly sought news from their native land.

On board the ship, Delveaux and Constant made acquaintance with other passengers, among them Etienne Dandois, Alexis Franc and Francis Petris. They spent some time visiting their friends in Aux premiers Belges. They met a priest while in Green Bay and he told them to contact a Mr. Rikari, who could speak French. Rikari lived in the Township of Union and was able to locate lands for those who were looking for it. Delveaux,

Etienne Dandois, Alexis Franc and Francis Petris accompanied Rikari, who with his compass led them directly to Section 6, Township 26, Range 24 in the Township of Brussels.

There Ferdinand Delveaux took up four forties of wooded land, Alexis Franc took two, Dandois two and Petris two. Such is the story given by Constant Delveaux before he died in 1923 and it is the only reminiscence left by any of those first pioneers. These four families were the first settlers in the Township of Brussels.

Other Early Arrivals

However, before the year 1856 ended, more families took up land in the Township of Brussels. They were Michael Balza, Clement Bassine, Anton Bougnet, Martin Baye, Jean Bero, Louis Coisman, Lambert Cumber, Marie Dachelet, Francois DeMeuse, Charles DeWitt, John Englebert, Desire Englebert, Louis Gaspard, John Guilette, Joseph Gigot, Charles Gilson, Joseph Gilson, Pierre Lardinois, Felecian Maceaux, Francois Martin, Cornelious Massart, Anton Naniot, Amond Naze, Prosper Naze, Joseph Quartermont, Hubert Rass, Joseph Rouer, Theodore Rouer, Edward Vangendertalean (Vandertie), Eli Wautlet.

Those who came in 1857 were Victor Brans, John B. Charles, Ferdinand Coco, Tousand Dachelet, Pierre Devos, Joseph Francis, Alexander Herlache, Theodore Lebott, Leonard LeCloux, Charles Mignon, Norbert Mignon, Constant Thiry, Ignace Zephirin.

In 1858 came Alexander Meunier, Alexander Pierre, Francois Pierre; in 1864 came Oliver DeDecker, Joseph LuMaye; in 1868 came Pascal Francois, in 1869; Anton Virlee, George Wautlet; in 1870, Eugene DeJardin, Peter Bournoville, Constant Flemal.

Not to be overlooked, are two Frenchmen who came in the early 1850's. They were Pierre and John Andre, better known among the settlers as "Del Fransee," the Frenchman. Both were born near the Lorraine edge which borders Germany and for that reason were able to speak some German. John was born in 1825 and Pierre in 1827.

Although they did not settle in the Township of Brussels, John Andre staked out an 80-acre plot of land just across the Brussels township boundary line in the Township of Lincoln, Kewaunee county. Pierre Andre never married and continued to live with his brother, John, until his death in 1912.

Many more families are known to have come between the years, 1858 and 1870, but research did not name them for the reason that they perhaps were squatters on their land and were not recorded because they did not pay the fees required by law. For some reason or other these Belgian emigrants occupied the western half of the Township of Brussels. The eastern half was occupied by families of German descent.

Upon reaching their land, these Belgian settlers immediately fell to the task of putting up some kind of shelter but their huts were made mostly of cedar and hemlock boughs providing no protection from rain. It was necessary to build log houses but there was plenty of timber to be had for that purpose.

There were in most cases no nails or hardware in the construction of these houses. The whipsaw was necessary to rip a log into planks or boards for a door, and hinges were often made of leather strips. Openings between the logs were chinked with clay mud, as there was no lime to be had for making mortar. The floor consisted of split logs, chairs were benches of split blocks.

Outdoor Ovens

But these primitive homes kept out the cold very well in winter. The house was heated by a box stove with no oven. For that reason outdoor ovens were constructed of handmade brick. These ovens resembled something like a large fireplace where underneath was the fire and above it the oven. Prior to baking, a fire was made in the oven and kept going until the bricks were red hot. Then as many as a dozen loaves of bread were baked at one time. The heat from the bricks was enough to bake the bread.

Those who have never eaten homemade bread baked in an outdoor oven are entirely unfamiliar with the appetizing taste of such bread. The loaves came out of the

oven crusted a golden brown and light as a feather. When the kitchen ranges with ovens came on the market, the outdoor oven was no longer used. Rarely does one see one of these ovens as he drives thru the Belgian settlement today.

Now that the houses were built, came the most important work of clearing the land. In this work the whole family participated in the felling of cedar, pine and hemlock as well as hardwood. There was no market for logs, therefore they had to be rolled on a pile and burned. It was a terrific back-breaking job and all winter the pile of logs was smoldering and burning.

By spring every Belgian settler had a little clearing around his house which he seeded to wheat and also planted potatoes, the two most necessary ingredients in his daily diet.

Money Is Gone

By this time there money was gone and it became necessary for most of the men to leave home and seek employment in the city so as to earn a few dollars. They then left their wooden shoes at home and on foot departed to such cities as Green Bay, Milwaukee and Chicago. Now for weeks, and even months at a time, the women and children were left alone in the little log houses scattered throughout the dense forest.

The loneliness of those days, and especially nights, were never forgotten by the women who, startled at every sound, imagined themselves being attacked by Indians or wild beasts.

By spring, there was a scarcity of food in the settlement. Many families ran out of flour and did not taste bread for weeks at a time and there was no milk or butter. But after a long interval, there was rejoicing again – the father had come home from his work in the city with what money he was able to save while at work. Although he had to walk, and did not come home empty handed but brought home a few supplies, as much as carrying would permit.

For his wife, he brought a few kitchen utensils and for the children, perhaps a few colored ribbons for the girls, and a few sticks of candy for the boys.

Perhaps the best gift brought home by Chrysoston Herlache was a kicking and struggling calf which was carried on his

shoulders all the way from Bay Settlement. This calf was to become the ancestor of the Herlache herd.



The first Misere grade school, later moved to Brussels township and used as a garage near the Ed Rouer property.



A DRIVE SOUTH OF Brussels reveals this old building, a former blacksmith shop that served area settlers. The need for such a facility developed along with early first roads. It took years before trails were cleared for wheeled travel. Stumps, stones and ravines were obstructions.

PART V

BRUSSELS SOIL ADAPTABLE TO WHEAT; BY 1860
LIVING BECOMES EASIER; CIVIL WAR TAKES SOME
OF NEW CITIZENS, WOMEN WORK HARD; SHIP
BUILDING AT GARDNER.

The soil in the southern and western half of the township of Brussels was adaptable to the raising of wheat and so the early Belgian settlers sowed much wheat. With favorable weather conditions the crop was unusually good. In due time harvesting was at hand, followed by threshing with a flail.

Now came the problem of getting the wheat ground into flour. The nearest flour mills were in Wolf River (now Algoma) and in Bay Settlement, but no wagon road led to either place.

It was, therefore, customary for a woman to take a bushel of wheat on her head and walk thru the woods to a flour mill. To an American today, it would be impossible to carry half that amount of wheat any distance. However, the pioneer Belgian women were physically strong and accustomed to hard manual labor.

Little by little more land was cleared and cultivated. But in the year 1857 there was a severe depression in the United States resulting in a financial crisis which paralyzed most industries everywhere and the Belgian pioneers were unable to find employment outside of their little clearing.

As a result of this depression, the pioneers took into consideration the possibilities of making a little extra money nearer to home. All around their log homes stood forests of pine, hemlock and some hardwoods. Pine logs were valuable and selling at \$1.50 a thousand board feet, but the Belgians had neither oxen nor horses to haul them out of the woods.

Some of them thought of the idea of making shingles. Pine shingles in Green Bay were selling at \$1.50 per thousand. Here, they said, was a chance to make some extra money. The pine trees were felled, the logs cut into 18 inch bolts and

split into half inch thickness with an instrument called a "froee."

It usually was the father and sons who shaved the shakes into shingles with a drawknife and bound them into bundles containing 250 shingles to a bundle.

The bundles were then carried to the bay shore where once a week a schooner from Green Bay came for a load of shingles. There were no docks those days; therefore it was necessary for the owner to get a small boat to carry the bundles to the schooner which was anchored farther out in deep waters.

In time, shingle making was engaged in by every Belgian pioneer. In 1860, more than four million hand made shingles were shipped out of Brussels. By this time, some of the settlers were able to purchase a yoke of oxen or if not, then a cow. The cow served a dual purpose, that of giving milk and also for hauling shingles to the bay shore, as well as for use in plowing.

Civil War Begins

By 1860 the Belgians in Brussels were beginning to forget the hardships which befell them in earlier years. Their little fields were producing good crops and prices were fair for their surplus products and their shingles. Some were buying a yoke of oxen, while other settlers who were a little better off purchased a horse or two.

They were optimistic of the future and talked of establishing businesses, when late in 1861, came word that Fort Sumter had been fired upon and announcing to them that it was not the beginning of good times, but rather the beginning of a long, cruel Civil War in the United States.

While they were far from the scene of fighting, it did have its adverse effect on the Belgian settlers. Since by this time they were citizens of this country, Lincoln's call for 75,000 men affected them.

Men were called into service and Brussels furnished its full quota of soldiers.

Those that were called into service from the township of Brussels were: Alexis Frank, Alexander Balza, Julian Delfosse, Jean Dantoin, Jean Rouer, Joseph Destree, Jean Tricott, Clement Geniesse, John Macceaux. Others who responded to the call and who, after the war settled in Brussels township, were Frank Gregor and B.B. Day.

The Civil War was a setback to the settlers in Brussels as well as in other townships in Door county. During the four-year war, while fathers were fighting battles, the wives, daughters, sisters and sometimes mothers, together with men who were not called, were working the little farms the best way they could in order to maintain and support themselves and their children.

During those days, it was not an uncommon sight to see Belgian women driving a yoke of oxen when harvesting or plowing a field. At last, after four years of fighting, the surviving soldiers returned home. Some engaged in business, some others in farming. Others tackled the primitive forest which fell before their axes, thereby enlarging their clearing to add acreage.

Some shingle and grist mills sprung up near the Brussels settlement; LeFebure's saw and shingle mill at Walhain; Decker's lumber and shingle mill in Casco; Delveaux's mill, Cowels shingle mill at Bay Settlement, Scofield's sawmill near Dyckesville and Williamson's shingle and sawmill east of Brussels.

The location of these mills was advantageous to the early Belgian settlers in that they could obtain employment in them in lieu of walking long distances to Green Bay, Milwaukee or Chicago as before.

Prosperity was returning and was visible everywhere. Some settlers were able to purchase reapers which replaced the back-breaking occupation of cutting grain with the grain cradle. Others purchased other simple farm implements such as the steel plow, while at the same time increasing their livestock – all contributing

towards that progress which makes man independent and free.

Gardner Starts Mill

Up to 1860, there were very few roads in the township but something happened nearby which stimulated the building of roads. Fallen logs were usually laid across the intended road and covered with earth.

In the 1860's F.B. Gardner started a business venture in the area which is now Little Sturgeon. His first venture was a sawmill which employed about 50 men.

This he followed with the construction of a gristmill and it was the first gristmill in Door county and was a great boom to the pioneer farmers. Sometimes as many as 40 to 60 wagon loads of grain came thru the forest from Brussels, Red River, or as far away as Luxemburg, to be ground into grist.

To accommodate them, Gardner built a rooming house where the farmers could cook and sleep while waiting for their grist. He built a three-story building 30 by 60 feet with a basement that was filled with all kinds of farm implements, merchandise and vehicles needed in a new developing agricultural area. All kinds of produce was taken in trade, as there was very little money, so the barter method was used. Gardner's was the largest business establishment in the county up to that time.

By the winter of 1868, Gardner added a shingle and lath mill. As many as 80,000 shingles were made in one day.

All this gave a splendid opportunity for Brussels pioneers to find employment in his mill. A storehouse 40 by 425 feet was constructed to store the many products until they could be loaded onto his lake vessels bound for Milwaukee and Chicago.

Shipbuilding had been going on for some time but had taken on new proportions. At this time, Gardner had in his employ 100 ship carpenters besides another 150 men in the woods cutting timber, teaming and milling. Many vessels were built in his shipyard in Little Sturgeon during his business residency there.

After the Chicago fire in 1871, business had a great revival and shipbuilding was pushed with all speed. With all this business going on, Little Sturgeon was the

most active locality in the county.

The Chicago fire laid that city in ashes and there was a great demand for material with which to rebuild it. Stone, brick, lime, lumber, etc., had a ready sale and Gardner took advantage of it. He took steps to erect two more modern patent process lime kilns. A big boarding house was erected on top of the bluff and at the base of the kilns, a pier was built.

For many years, weekly trips were made by Gardner's vessels to and from his pier to Chicago with cargoes of lime. It is said his kilns were able to burn 160 barrels of lime daily.

Mr. Gardner was one of the most remarkable men who came to Door county. Coming in the early 1850's, he purchased the homestead of Increase Claflin Oct. 18, 1954. Claflin was the first white settler in Door county, coming in 1835. Gardner built up an industry which at its peak of activity gave employment to 400 men.

Boom Collapses

For a decade, there was a booming activity in Little Sturgeon. However, in 1875 the boom following the Chicago fire collapsed. Lumber, timber, lime and other products found an unsaleable market. Such was the case with Gardner. Foreseeing the eventful declining business activity, he sold part of his business holdings in Little Sturgeon Bay to Albert Spear.

On the night of Feb. 1, 1877, fire broke out in the blacksmith shop which spread to the mill and the entire plant was destroyed. Spear could not stand the loss and sold the rest of his holdings to the Piper Ice company. The ice company erected five

large ice houses and employed 100 men cutting ice during the winter.

In 1898, the ice company was absorbed by the ice trust and business in Little Sturgeon began a rapid decline, finally coming to a standstill. The huge ice houses were torn down. Other remaining buildings were also demolished, while still others were moved to Sturgeon Bay. The big pier built of huge pine logs crumbled. The stones of the old gristmill which ground so much grist for the Belgian settlers were chipped away by souvenir and relic hunters and carried away.

Once again peace and quiet descended upon the region with summer resorts taking the place of buildings which once stood there. Once again the area lies almost as tranquil and primeval as the day Increase Claflin settled on it in 1835. A business activity, which it is said, netted a thousand dollars a day for Gardner finally came to an end.

It must be said that in addition to his active business in Little Sturgeon, Gardner was interested in other areas, notably in the building of hotels. He spent \$100,000 in the construction of a four-story brick hotel in Pensaukee which was built in 1877 but it had a sudden and disastrous fate. It was hardly completed when, in 1878, it was struck by a cyclone and totally demolished.

He built the "Gardner" hotel in Chicago which did not prove a financial success. Other heavy business reverses were a heavy blow to Gardner. His health failed and not long after he was suddenly struck dead by apoplexy while walking to the station in Pensaukee. The township of Gardner was named after him.

PART VI

GARDNER'S ENTERPRISE INFLUENCES BRUSSELS, ROAD BUILDING: PIERRE ARRIVES IN '61, BUILDS HALF-WAY HOUSE.

The preceding installment dealt considerably with Freeman Gardner and his business activities in the Township of Gardner. While it may not have been in conformity with the history of the Brussels township, Gardner's varied business influenced the agricultural development of the Township of Brussels to such an extent that it is worth mentioning.

Here, within a few miles of the Brussels township there were a sawmill, shingle mill, gristmill, blacksmith shop, farm implement shop, lime kilns and a shipyard. Gardner could supply the pioneer farmers with almost anything they needed to develop their farms.

Besides, there was an opportunity for employment in any of his business enterprises. No longer was it necessary for the head of the family to travel long distances to larger cities such as Milwaukee or Chicago to seek employment and earn a few extra dollars.

Without Gardner's various enterprises, the agricultural development in the area might have been much slower.

As was previously mentioned, Gardner's enterprises stimulated the building of roads. He needed a road running from Sturgeon Bay to Bay Settlement while the Belgian pioneers needed some to get to Little Sturgeon, which was the location of Gardner's business activities, so they could transact business and obtain needed supplies.

Such roads were hastily constructed by cutting down trees. Where the land was of higher elevation, there was no problem but in low and swampy spots the road was built in corduroy fashion – that is, logs were laid crosswise and covered with earth.

To be sure, these were primitive roads but served the Belgians quite well with slow oxen travel. However, Gardner's main interest was the building of the road con-

necting Sturgeon Bay and Bay Settlement, which would enable him to ship some of his products by land, in addition to his lake vessels, which carried them as far south as Chicago and other southern lake ports. His road followed closely to the bay shore line.

Open Post Office

Up to 1861, there was no business activity in the Brussels township of any kind, it being a pioneer agricultural area. Upon the completion of the bay shore road, a post office was established in Sugar Creek, which was in the township of Union. Michael Schmidt, a German, was the first postmaster.

This post office served the entire Belgian community for several years and some had to walk 10 or 12 miles to get their mail. It took some years before the highway was cleared of obstructions such as stumps, stones and ravines.

Michael Schmidt opened a small grocery store in connection with the post office and it served the Belgian community for many years. In fact, the store was in continuous operation until a short time ago when it was closed. Competition with larger stores became too keen.

In 1861, Francois Pierre arrived in the Brussels area. Upon his arrival in the United States from Belgium some years before, he and his family located in Alton, Ill. However, hearing of the Belgian settlement in this area he decided to locate among the Belgian speaking people. Upon his arrival, he opened a small tavern and it was located one-half mile west of the present village of Brussels. By this time another road was built from Sturgeon Bay to Green Bay and it became a stage route.

Pierre's tavern was sort of a half-way house where no doubt stage coach passengers could stop and quench their thirst. The area was given the name of

“Brussels” by the Belgian pioneers, the same name as the capital city in their homeland in Belgium.

The post office in Sugar Creek was transferred to Brussels where Francois Pierre became the first postmaster, a position he held for 38 years.

He was succeeded by Frank Quartermont, who held the position for one year, and he in turn was succeeded by Moses Gilson, who held the postmastership for only nine months. He, in turn, was succeeded by Jules Pierre, a son of Francois Pierre, who was the postmaster until recent times.

The name of Pierre was a prominent one in the Brussels area for many years. After a few years and until the stage route was discontinued, Francois Pierre closed his tavern and moved to the so-called “Five Corners,” so named because five roads met

at this junction. This particular junction was the location of the Village of Brussels but research does not come up telling who or what formed the nucleus of business activity to found the village.

Bottkols Build Mill

By 1881, much land was cleared for tillage and since the soil was good, much wheat was seeded. However, there was no flour mill in the locality but two enterprising brothers, George and Matthew Bottkol, who had a flour and sawmill in Euren in the Township of Lincoln, quickly saw an opportunity in Brussels. In that year, they built a flour mill one-half mile south of the Village of Brussels.

Why they did not build the flour mill in the village site of Brussels is not known.

The mill was run by steam power. Theirs was a thriving business from the start and during their business career, it



PIERRE-VIRLEE COMPANY came into existence about the turn of the century. The firm engaged in several businesses, including a creamery. This building, located south of Brussels, was once the flourishing Pierre-Virlee Creamery. It was later sold to a farmer group which converted it into a cheese factory and named it Brussels Dairy company. Henry Englebert was its first cheesemaker, 1917-27, and he was succeeded by Math Tlachac. The cheese factory was closed several years ago but the structure still stands.

was not unusual to see as many as 20 wagon loads of wheat waiting in line to have their wheat ground into flour.

This continued several years until the chinch bug and wheat rust made their appearance and ravaged wheat crops year after year. Since the soil was rich and adaptable, the Belgian farmers went into the seeding of Scotch peas which produced abundantly and for which there was a good market demand.

Before the turn of the century, Bottkol Brothers disposed of the flour mill to a new company made up of Francois Pierre, Antoine Virlee and Joseph DeKeyser. The company was known as the Pierre-Virlee company and was prominent in business for many years in the Township of Brussels. In addition to the flour mill, they added a sawmill.

All during the winter months farmers hauled logs to the site and it is said there were piles of logs everywhere. All summer

long could be heard the buzzing of the saw as it bit into a log fed to it.

Besides this, the Pierre-Virlee company engaged in the mercantile business and also operated a creamery. This location, a half mile south of the Village of Brussels, became the busiest spot in the township. Since competition was less keen than it is today, theirs was a lucrative business. In connection with the store, there was a boarding house where employees took their meals and some took lodging.

As their mercantile business increased, it was necessary to build a larger store. Consequently, they put up a new brick building which enabled them to increase their stock of goods. The old store building still stands and is occupied as a dwelling.

The creamery was a butter factory where farmers could sell their milk. It was a modern butter factory in its day and butter was packed into butter tubs weighing approximately 60 pounds and shipped to the



LOCATED NEAR BRUSSELS, this building served as a boarding house for the Pierre-Virlee Milling company almost 100 years ago. The structure is now used as a residence.

market in Green Bay. An ice house was constructed to store the ice used to cool the cream.

The ice was cut in a pond in the rear of the premises. The name Pierre-Virlee company was synonymous with the business and was known throughout the county as well as in the areas farther away.

Fire Hits Mill

With their flour mill, sawmill, mercantile business and butter factory, it seemed the business would continue for many more years. But the flour mill was completely destroyed by fire in 1917. It was then that Pierre-Virlee company dissolved partnership and sold the mercantile business to a new company formed by Eli, Antone and Joseph Chaudoir.

The creamery, no longer a butter factory, was sold to a group of farmers who converted it into a cheese factory. They named

it the Brussels Dairy company and Henry Englebert was the first cheesemaker from 1917 to 1927. He was succeeded by the writer of this history who made cheese there from 1927 to 1938.

The Chaudoir brothers rebuilt the flour mill the same year in which the first mill was destroyed by fire in 1917. However, flour milling was no longer profitable since flour could be obtained in most any grocery store. They turned the mill into a grist mill which continued grinding grist for six years, when it, too, was destroyed by fire and was never rebuilt.

Today, only the stone foundation is visible where once two mills stood.

Due to keen competition, the cheese factory was closed several years ago but the building still stands. What was once a busy spot, gave way to new businesses which started in the Village of Brussels.



The former Chaudoir store is south of Brussels. Like many other businesses here, it gave way to new commercial endeavors in the hamlet of Brussels.

PART VII

WAYSIDE CHAPELS: AN APPARITION IN ROBINSONVILLE; EARLY CHURCHES BUILT IN NAMUR, BRUSSELS, ROSIERE, MISERE; DISCONTINUE HOME FOR CRIPPLED CHILDREN.

The Belgian pioneers who made their way into the back woods of Wisconsin from their homeland in Belgium were a pious and a religious people.

Most of them clung to their faith in spite of the hardships they endured in the New World.

Those Belgians who left their church did so under the influence of one Joseph J. Fillate, a fallen away Catholic himself, who worked among them in the late 1880's and early 90's. But that is another story.

Up to 1860, there were no churches in the area but in that year one was built in Namur which included a school and a sister's house, the latter which is still standing, although not in use. The church was given the name of St. Mary of the Snows.

The first Catholic church in the township of Brussels was built about 1865 and this log structure stood about half a mile north-east of the present St. Hubert's church in Rosiere. It burned in the big fire of 1871. The congregation could not agree where to build the new church; those in the southern half of the congregation wanted to build it in Rosiere, while those in the northern half wanted it to be built on the original site.

As a result of this squabble, each built its own church, St. Hubert's in Rosiere, for the southern half of the congregation, while the northern half built St. Michael's in Misere. The pastor sided with the northerners and a pastor's home was also built but burned down some years later.

The brick-constructed St. Michael's still stands and has been in use, until recently, after a hundred years. It is cared for by a few faithful parishioners and was a mission church of St. Hubert's in Rosiere.

Build Chapels

In the early days of foot travel, three or

four miles thru the woods was a long distance to attend church, consequently the early Belgian pioneers could not attend Mass as often as they would like to. Father Daems could not attend to all their spiritual needs because of the large territory he had to serve.

The lack of spiritual guidance often worried the mothers who feared their children would fall away from their church. To solve this problem some families built little shrines or chapels on the wayside near their homes. These wayside chapels were 8 by 10 feet and within contained an altar, some holy water, religious pictures and sacred ornaments. These shrines were usually built in remembrance of a departed parent or relative. After their day's work, and especially during the month of May, the family gathered together for prayer and devotion.

It was a beautiful custom which helped to keep alive their religion, a custom brought to this country from their homeland in Belgium where, likewise, such little chapels were in use. As one rides thru the Belgian settlement he can see some of these chapels still standing but not used as frequently in this day of automobile travel. New state and county highway construction have ruthlessly pushed some of these chapels into oblivion.

Brice Family Arrives

Among the exodus of pioneer Belgians who emigrated to Wisconsin was the Brice family. An extract from the Register of Emigrants indicates that Lambert Brice and his wife, Marie Catherine, left Belgium on June 9, 1855, with their four children, Esperance, 27; Adele, 24; Isabel, 20, and Vital, 5. They landed in New York and immediately started westward for Wisconsin. Records show that Aug. 7, 1855, Lambert and Marie Brice purchased 240

acres of land in the township of Red River for the sum of \$240.

Their daughter, Adele, was an instrument of God's design. She was born in Dion-le-Val in the Province of Brabant, Jan. 30, 1831.

Little is known of her childhood except that her education was very meager and that she met with an accident in which she suffered the loss of one eye. From childhood on she was known for her fervent piety and simple religious ways. She obediently acceded to the wishes of her parents and came to America. She shared with them the struggling pioneer life, such as working in the fields, preparing the soil for planting with the most primitive tools, carrying grain on her head to the grist mill and preparing shingles for market.

Adele Sees Vision

It was in the early part of August, 1859, that Adele is said to have seen the Blessed Mother the first time.

She was going to the gristmill about four miles from Robinsonville with a sack of wheat on her head. She followed a trail that passed where the Chapel now stands, which at that time was all wilderness. As Adele came near the place, she saw a lady in white standing between two trees, one a maple and the other a hemlock.

She was frightened and stood still. The vision slowly disappeared, leaving a white cloud.

Adele continued her journey to the mill and returned home without seeing anything. She told her parents what had happened and they wondered what it could be. The following Sunday she had to pass there again on her way to church in Bay Settlement. This time she was accompanied by her sister, Isabel, and a neighbor lady. As they neared the spot Adele became frightened and in a hushed voice she said, "There is that lady again" but her companions did not see anything.

They waited a few minutes and Adele told them the vision had vanished. She went to her confessor and spoke to him about what she had seen. Her confessor said that if it was a heavenly messenger she would see it again and that it would not harm her but to ask her who she was and



Sister Adele

what she wanted.

On the way home Adele again saw the beautiful lady clothed in dazzling white with a yellow sash around her waist. Her dress fell to her feet in graceful folds. She had a crown of stars around her forehead and her long golden hair fell loosely onto her shoulders.

"Who are you and what do you want of me," Adele asked.

"I am the Queen of Heaven who prays for the conversion of sinners and I wish you to do the same," replied the radiant visitor.

"Adele, who is it?" ask one of her companions, "and why can't we see her as you do?"

"Kneel," said Adele, "the lady is the Queen of Heaven." "What more can I do, dear Lady?" said Adele, weeping.

"Gather the children in this wilderness and teach them what they should know about salvation," replied the lady. Then she slowly vanished, wrapped in a luminous atmosphere, leaving Adele overwhelmed and prostrate on the ground in the dense forest.

Spot Is Marked

The people were astonished when they heard the news. Most of them believed it



Interior of St. Ghislane Chapel on the Jule Vandertie farm, R1, Forestville. St. Ghislane is the intercessor for children afflicted with convulsions, and, according to Mrs. Vandertie, all petitions have been successfully answered when offered at the Chapel.



Chapel in Robinsonville



Sister Adele's Grave

but there were some who thought Adele was demented. A small oratory 10x12 feet of logs was constructed by Adele's father on the spot where Adele saw the vision.

This became the first chapel.

So profoundly convinced was she of the reality of the vision that from that day until her death she devoted her entire life to the work she believed she had been commissioned to do.

She persevered in her mission, going from house to house, helping unsolicited to do whatever was to be done in the household and asking in return that she be permitted to give instruction to the children.

Faithful to her mission, she was seen going thru the woods as far north as Sturgeon Bay some 40 miles from her home. Rain, snow or heat did not prevent Adele from accomplishing her work, neither fatigue or ridicule had any effect upon her.

When Adele considered the children sufficiently prepared, she would bring them to the pastor in Bay Settlement for examination by Father Daems who then would admit the children to their First Holy Communion.

The occurrence of the apparition and the work given to Adele spread far and wide. Pilgrims arrived almost daily to see the privileged place. Soon it was apparent that the little log chapel was too small to accommodate the people.

In 1861 the settlers, with the aid of Lambert Brice, built a larger chapel, 24 by 40 feet – a small church edifice, capable of seating about 100 persons and over the entrance was written the inscription “Notre Dame de bon Secours, priez pour nous.” (Our Lady of Good Help, Pray for Us).

Low, unpainted benches without backs answered the purpose of pews, but the altar was richly and expensively decorated with paintings, images and silver plate. On the side walls of the sacristy were hung crutches and canes said to have been left there by cripples who had been cured of lameness thru the instrumentality of Our Lady.

Every year on Assumption Day, Aug. 15,

Belgians came by oxen, or on foot to worship in the chapel. On their knees they shuffled around the altar in the sacristy praying the rosary and it is said that a ring of worn-out floor circled the altar.

Father Crud Comes

In 1865 the Rev. Philip Crud was appointed pastor of the Belgian colony. So impressed was he with Adele's work that he advised her to encourage others to share her labors. He urged her to appeal for funds among the Belgian pioneers to construct a convent and a school where children could come for instruction and at the same time she would conserve her strength.

The Rev. Crud supplied her with a letter of recommendation and Adele set out with an English-speaking companion to solicit and beg for funds to build the convent and school. For weeks, they traveled thru the Belgian settlement soliciting funds and as poor as some of the settlers were, Adele and her companion were never turned away without some contribution.

Finally, in 1865-1868 a frame convent and school were built. There was no “price” for teaching, no tuition bills to make out for the pupils even at the end of the school year. The parents, finding the school a free school, were glad to send their children there to be instructed in their faith.

Once the school was started, Sister Adele soon found out there was a lack of students. Some came from as far as Oconto. It became a boarding school, where students received board and lodging for a dollar a week.

Now that a convent was built, girls entered and became nuns and helped in the administration of the school and convent.

Build Third Chapel

By 1880 the frame constructed school and convent were showing the ravages of time. Besides both almost burned down in the great fire of 1871 (which will be told in another installment).

In that year a third chapel was constructed but this time it was built of brick to make it more fireproof. In 1885 a brick constructed convent and school were built replacing the frame structures built in 1865-1868.

Alms came freely in 1885 when the new

Sister's home was built. It was a large building, well fitted for the end in view. Besides a large basement, there was a pantry, and a dining room for both Sisters and school children. There was a classroom and playroom for the children, a sitting room and a dormitory for the Sisters as well as a parlor for their use. On the second floor was the children's dormitory where they could accommodate more than 100 children every year.

A small brick building served as sort of a hospital accommodation for the sick or injured for Sisters knew considerable about caring for the sick and injured. Later on this building was converted into additional school facilities. The school continued in operation until 1928 when enrollment fell to such an extent that it was no longer profitable to operate. Swift automobile travel made the difference.

Atone for Sins

From its very inception, devoted Belgian pioneers came to worship at the chapel on Aug. 15, it being Assumption Day. In those early days, many walked miles. Some put peas or gravel in their wooden shoes as a self-inflicted penance as an atonement for their sins. Others fasted and some fainted on the way due to weakness, but so strong was their faith that they did not mind personal pain or sacrifice.

When they reached the chapel they sometimes found thousands of people gathered there. In 1879 it was estimated that there were a thousand horse teams on the chapel grounds.

It was a fine sight to see so many buggies and wagons along the roadside. Then a procession was formed which wound its way around the chapel premises. Horsemen wearing sashes around their shoulders usually opened the procession. There were floating banners, young girls clad in white carrying the statue of the Virgin, while school children carried baskets of flowers which were strewn along the procession route. Ten abreast the people marched, chanting favorite religious hymns or praying their rosaries.

Five priests in sacerdotal robes followed in the procession and in those early days

the discharge of a cannon could be heard.

When the procession ended, three outdoor Masses were read, sermons were preached in five different languages, for not only Belgians came but there were people of different nationalities, French, German, English, Dutch and Bohemians.

It must have been a grand sight in those days! The practice still continues to the present date, but of course in much less elaborate fashion than it was then.

Rebuilt in 1941-42

By 1941 the brick chapel was 60 years old and again the ravages of time were taking their toll. It was decided to build a new one, the fourth. When the old chapel was razed in 1941 to make way for the new one, the stumps of the two trees between which the Blessed Virgin was supposed to have stood in 1859 were found. They were dug up and became the possession of the Sisters of St. Francis in Bay Settlement.

The cornerstone of the new chapel was laid on Dec. 8, 1941 by the Most Rev. Bishop Rhode and the structure was dedicated by him on July 12, 1941.

This beautiful red brick gothic structure accommodates a seating capacity of 300 persons. In the basement of the crypt stands the altar on which is placed the lovely statue of Our Lady, donated by the Rev. Philip Crud. It was sent to him from France in 1907.

The shrine of Our Lady of Good Help was the first house of worship in the Belgian settlement. It is true that Sister Adele's name will always be linked with the chapel since she was the instrument chosen to transmit heaven's message to the Belgians. She left her mark in the religious history of that community as well as in surrounding areas.

Sister Adele's death took place July 5, 1896, at the age of 66 years. Soon after her death a general decline seemed to have gripped the place. Several of her co-working Sisters passed away, leaving only three of her group. Extinction never seemed so imminent as it did when Sister Adele passed away. Due to lack of leadership, lack of funds, matters at the chapel grew continually worse.

Bishop Messmer of Green Bay paid

a visit to the chapel and found conditions pathetic—outstanding bills with a lack of funds to pay them, no credit and dire want. On Oct. 24, 1902, the bishop called upon the superior of the St. Francis Convent in Bay Settlement to see what arrangements could be made for the community to take over the work at the Chapel.

The Franciscan Sisters agreed to take over. Supplies were sent from the Mother House in Bay Settlement and a \$1,000 debt was repaid, putting the chapel on a sound religious and financial footing.

1953 Brings Change

The summer of 1953 was the time of another change. The diocesan authorities announced that due to circumstances the Home for Crippled Children had served its purpose and would be discontinued.

For more than 50 years the Sisters of St. Francis at Bay Settlement had labored at the chapel and continued the work of instructing the children. They were

granted the use of the Chapel school as a Preparatory Novitiate. It then became an auxiliary training center to prepare their young members for their future role as educators, especially in the principles of religious training.

One hundred and fourteen years have passed since the apparition at Robinsonville. Today there is danger threatening us, fear of annihilation by atomic destruction gripping our civilization, the loss of the sense of sin by many, lack of the knowledge of God and His laws, greed, disrespect of law and order. If continued, they can hurl humanity down the precipice of ruin and destruction. Some of those are the very things which brought down the Roman Empire, thought to be invincible. Our age is characterized by materialism which deprives men of the true sense of values and causes them to seek only sensual satisfaction.

That is not good for our country.

PART VIII

END OF CIVIL WAR REVIVES BUSINESS, BOOSTS PRICES; ASHES OF GREAT FIRE HARDLY COOL, BEFORE REBUILDING BEGINS.

After the Civil War came to an end in 1865, there was a great business revival accompanied by high prices never seen before. Building operations in a thousand new prospective cities were resumed which called for great quantities of lumber and other building material. A number of sawmills were erected in different parts of the Belgian settlement.

This building revival played into the hands of the Belgian pioneer farmers since there was plenty of timber which could be cut and hauled to the saw mills.

Foremost among these mills was the Scofield Company in Red River. A pier 1100 feet long was erected and a mammoth shingle mill was built capable of sawing a million shingles a day, this in addition to the saw mill.

Hundreds of men, mostly Belgians, found employment in Scofield's mills. Other industries, likewise, were booming after the Civil War. It seemed like a long period of prosperity was at hand.

But suddenly in the midst of these prosperous times came a tragedy so terrible that no pen is adequate to describe it.

The summer of 1871 was extremely dry and not a drop of rain fell from July until the middle of October. The ground became powder dry with crevices here and there, and swamps dried up.

Harvesting was done early that year due to the drought. Trees in the forest shed their dry leaves creating a potential fire hazard. Even birds and animals in the forest acted strangely, foreboding something ominous to come. For days the Belgian region was blanketed by dense smoke which rolled in from the southwest, smarting the eyes and making breathing difficult.

By the middle of September, people became very alarmed. Forest fires were raging in many parts and creeping closer

and closer. The swamps were on fire and corduroy roads were burning, rail fences were reduced to ashes. Shingle roofs on the homes and barns were tinder dry so that it required a day and night watch that sparks which were flying thru the air would not settle on the roof and start a fire. Water was scarce as springs and wells dried up. The fire serpent kept crawling underground, frequently blazing forth, destroying timber which had stood for centuries.

Horizon Aglow

At night the sight was disheartening. The heavens around the horizon were aglow and the dark red as seen through the smoky atmosphere, seemed to threaten a great calamity soon to take place. Each evening the setting sun resembled a huge red ball as it disappeared below the horizon. Each day the Belgians prayed for rain but each day's cloudless skies and restless winds only added its share to the unceasing drought.

The forest fires crept nearer and nearer. The morning of Oct. 8 dawned on them with no perceptible change. In the afternoon the wind was quite fresh but died down in the evening and an unnatural stillness followed.

But in a few minutes there came a fierce gust of wind followed by a loud roaring sound. Then a flame shot up quickly followed by leaping tongues of fire. This time the terrible roaring of the wind together with the sound of the crashing trees caused the stoutest hearts to flutter.

The fire came to the Belgian settlement from every direction.

The night was made more hideous by the startling cries of birds, flying from every direction. Wild animals from the woods came running out to open fields seeking shelter among the bellowing cattle. People heard, saw and felt the terror of the fire

which engulfed them and screaming with fear, they fled from their homes into the clearing. There was no time to save anything except the clothes they wore. Huddled together in the little open field, they saw their homes consumed by the fiery monster.

Some people were screaming, others praying while still others were being smothered by the dense smoke and intense heat. It was an apathetic day for them.

The wide spreading track of ruin covered the greater portion of the peninsula from Green Bay northward to Sturgeon Bay. It covered an area 20 miles wide and 50 miles long. In the path of the fiery monster stood the Chapel in Robinsonville. There, too, the crucial hour had come. The hurricane of fire broke in all its fury.

Sister Adele and her companions were determined not to abandon the Chapel where they took refuge, it being the Virgin Mary's shrine. Pioneer Belgians in the area and their families came rushing to take refuge in the Chapel sanctuary. There they were encircled by the raging inferno with no means of escape and looking back they saw their homes literally swallowed by the fiery monster.

By this time the surrounding territory was one vast sea of fire and everything about them was destroyed, miles of desolation everywhere.

But the convent, school and Chapel remained intact. The five-acre area showed like an isle in a sea of ashes. The fire did not enter the Chapel ground. To the people huddled within, it seemed like a miracle sent from heaven to save their lives.

Brussels Hard Hit

In Door county the fire swept up from Brown county overrunning the townships of Union, Brussels, Gardner, Forestville, Nasewaupée and Clay Banks. The greatest destruction in this area was in the township of Brussels where practically every settler lost all or most of his possessions.

Within 24 hours the Belgian community was laid in ashes. At Williamsonville, in the township of Tornado, the sawmill, store, boarding house, large barn,

blacksmith shop, eight dwellings and other buildings were totally destroyed. In addition, 60 mill hands were burned to death. No matter in what direction they ran, there was fire so that they were unable to save themselves.

Today, a marker marks the spot where the Williamsonville mill stood. By this time some of the Belgians were wondering if the New World was as promising as they were led to believe.

Records in those days were not very accurately kept. However, they do show the following Belgian pioneers lost their homes, barns, crops, livestock, clothing and house furnishings: Tousant Dachelete, Francois Dennis, Eugene Rankin, Oliver Dedecker, Charles Piette, Alexander Meunier, Elie Simon, Frank LeGreve, Louis Coisman, Theodore LeBott, Louis Gaspard, Adrian Francis, Joseph Francis, Peter Francis, John B. Englebert, Joseph Englebert, Desire Englebert, J. F. Flemal, Charles Mignon, Norbert Mignon, Antone Mohemont, Clement Bassine, J. B. Denamur, J.B. Dewitt, Charles Dewitt, Constant Flemal, Leonard LeCloux, Eugene Delforge, Frank Martin, Jos. Lumaye, Charles Massart, Charles Rouer, Joseph Rouer, Louis Mignon, Leopold Lefebvre, John Stroobants, P. J. Renier, Felician Macciaux, Joseph Piette, Edward Vangindertalien (Vandertie), Ammond Naze, Prosper Naze, John Fauville, Isadore Tremble, Charles Tebon, Pascal Francis, J. G. Gilson, Antone Virlee, Francis Springlaire, Eloi Meunier.

In addition, there were several deaths caused by the fire.

When the fire was over, the Belgians looked upon an area of ashes. It was enough to cause them in despair to give up everything.

Within a few months, word reached their homeland in Belgium telling about the calamity that afflicted their brethren in America. Relief organizations in Belgium began soliciting for supplies which could be sent to the burnt out settlers. Shiploads of clothing, bedding, simple farm tools were sent to America to be distributed among the victims of the fire.

Although beset by loneliness, poverty, hunger and the irresistible ravages of nature, the pioneer Belgians struggled on. It was their courage and hope of ultimate prosperity, plus freedom that motivated them to carry on.

Rebuilding Starts

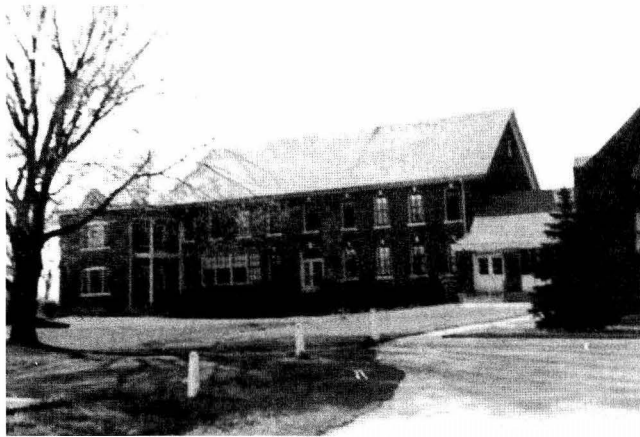
The ashes were hardly cold when they set out to rebuild their lost homes, barns and other farm buildings. One mile south of the village of Brussels there was a brick yard where bricks were made from the red clay found in the area. Research did not reveal who owned the brick yard at that time.

"This time," said the Belgians, "We will build our houses out of brick so that they will be more fireproof."

The brick yard became a busy place as

farmers hauled brick out of the yard. When coming from Belgium, many brought along trades in which they were engaged. Some were bricklayers, stone masons, blacksmiths, others were carpenters. By helping each other they were able to construct the necessary buildings without need to seek outside for skilled help. This accounts for some of the red brick homes seen in the Brussels area today.

In time, the Belgians completed the construction of their homes and barns. Once again they settled down to the task of farming, wanting to forget the calamity which befell them. By the turn of the century, much land was cleared; they became masters of the soil and were on the road to becoming prosperous farmers.



Former School and Crippled Children's Residence at Robinsonville.

PART IX

BELGIANS BRING ALONG THEIR CUSTOMS,
INCLUDING KERMISS, WITH BELGIAN PIE, CHICKEN
'BOYOO,' AND 5-PIECE LOCAL BAND.

When the Belgian immigrants came to this country, they brought with them several customs which had been celebrated each year in their mother country for over a hundred years. The Belgians are a congenial people and like to take part in frivolous as well as religious activities. Foremost and perhaps the most popular one was the Belgian kermis. After the harvesting was completed, it was customary for the people in Belgium to attend Mass to give thanks to the Lord for a bountiful harvest. This was followed by feasting and dancing. Some of the Belgians are musically talented and in most every community where a kermis was observed a local band was formed to play at dances. The kermis usually lasted three days.

By 1858 some of the Belgian immigrants had been in the United States for five years. Many were lonesome and homesick for their native land. Thus far there had been hard work, poverty and privation in the New World. Something was needed to

lift the sagging spirits of many when young broad-shouldered Amia Champaign, also a Belgian immigrant, had the answer. Said Champaign, "Why don't we have a kermis?" He passed along his idea which received favorable approval by his countrymen. "It is the thing we need," said many Belgians. "We have had good crops and we should thank the Lord for them."

The succeeding days were busy ones in the new, sparsely settled communities. In every home preparations for the event were made. Old trunks were dragged out from under puncheon beds or lifted down from the loft and there was a feverish overhauling of their contents to see if they contained any bits of finery for the coming event. Leather shoes, long set aside for special occasions, were re-oiled and made flexible. Fresh evergreen boughs were cut and brought in to replace the ones that served in lieu of a mattress. Earthen floors were newly sanded and there were long pilgrimages made to Dyckesville and Green Bay for supplies to replenish the larders.



An old landmark in Rosiere, the Rubens store, tavern and dance hall, was the festive center for many kermisses
Photo by Math S. Tlachac

Outdoor Ovens Used

Then came the baking which in the early days was done in outdoor ovens. As many as three dozen Belgian pies could be baked at one time. The Belgian pie! What would the kermis be without the famous delicacy, the crust of which was made of dough, spread over with prunes or apples and topped with homemade cottage cheese. So tasty it was that one bite invited another. Some families baked as many as a hundred pies which were set on an improvised table in the cellar where it was cool and damp, to keep the pies soft and mellow. The Belgian women were experts in the art of baked goods, and the brown crusted loaves of bread which came out of those outdoor ovens were light as a feather.

But the Belgian pie was only a part of the Sunday dinner menu. There was the famous "chicken boyoo" – a thick soup which was very tasty and appetizing. In addition there was "trippe," sort of a sausage made out of the choicest lean pork from a recently butchered hog. Cooked cabbage with various spiced seasonings were included in the trippe ingredients. There also was "jut" a dish made with cooked cabbage and potatoes well mashed and seasoned with salt and other ingredients such as butter or cream. Some housewives included "kaset" in the menu which is home-made cottage cheese, pressed into balls the size of an orange, seasoned with salt and pepper, then put into crocks to cure out until it could be spread on bread like butter. Some of the men made homemade beer out of barley and wild hops, found growing in the locality.

At last the day came when the first Belgian kermis would be held in America. It was in the year, 1858, and it was held in Rosiere on the third Sunday of September, the same day a similar event was taking place in a community called Rosiere in their native home of Belgium. Father Daems came from Bay Settlement to say the Mass in Rosiere. The church was well attended by people who came for the Mass and to partake of a sumptuous dinner prepared by housewives

in each home.

The Belgians enjoyed the inspiring sermon by Father Daems, who spoke their native language. After the Mass was over and as people were leaving the church, they were met by the local band consisting of Joseph Lumaye who played the cornet, Carl Masey, who played the slide trombone; Norbert Mignon, violin, Theophile LeBotte, clarinet, Frank LeGreve, bass drum. The band members were specially dressed for the occasion and striking out a tune they marched, preceded by a flag bearer, to an improvised hall.

Halfway to the hall the procession halted for a dance on the earthen road. This was called "the dance in the dust" and after several such dances, the band escorted the dancers to the hall. All afternoon and into the wee hours of the morning there was merrymaking and festivities. There were waltzes, two-steps and quadrilles. Such dances as tango or fox-trots were unheard of.

Usually after a quadrille, the caller would shout out, "All promenade to the bar." However, women did not enter a saloon in those days since it was beneath their dignity. If a woman wanted a glass of the amber colored liquid, it was brought to her by her dancing partner, and with him, she drank it out-of-doors.

Other Attractions

But dancing was not all the frolicking which took place at a kermis. There were all kinds of games of skill, such as trying to catch a greased pig. If anyone could catch the hog, he could claim it. There was a greased pole which some tried to climb, usually in failure. There were foot races and wrestling matches. In some instances a live goose was buried, leaving the head and neck protruding. Then a blind-folded person was given a scythe and if he could decapitate the goose's head, the goose was his. This cruel form was soon abolished.

A lunch wagon was on hand, where for five cents one could purchase a piece of baloney between two crackers or slices of bread. Usually the piece of baloney was cut from the link at an angle to make it look larger than it actually was.

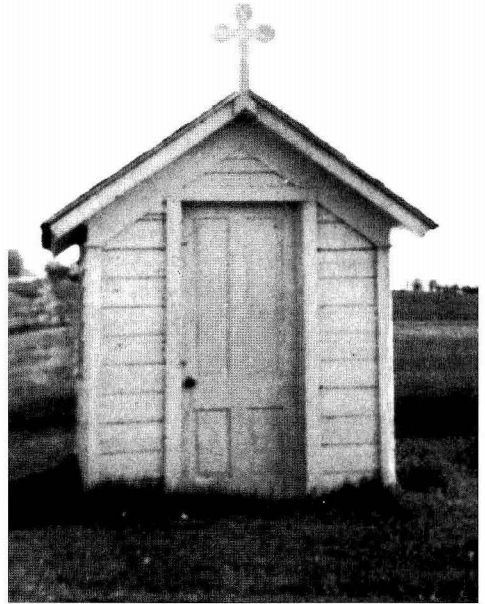
The next day was Monday, a day reserved for the "old folks" who in the evening came to the old folks' dance. In spite of difficult manual labor on the farm, it was surprising how people in their 70's and even 80's could swing around dancing waltzes or two-steps. So uniform did they keep in step that the lanterns hung up from the rafters of the hall, swung up and down in unison.

As the Belgian communities developed and new church congregations were formed, more kermesses were held. The first one after harvesting was completed was held in "Grandlez," now called Lincoln. It was held on the last Sunday in August. It was followed by kermesses in Brussels, Namur, Rosiere, Champion, Dyckesville, San Sauveur, Tonet, Thiry Daems and Misere. By the time the last kermess was held in November, the ground was already frozen or sometimes covered by snow.

Such were the Belgian kermesses which continued every year from 1858, simultaneously with those held in Belgium in localities of the same name. These kermesses among the Belgian settlement in the United States continued on until the First World War, when they slowly died out and are to the present generation only a memory.

Another beautiful custom brought along by the Belgians was the procession held each year on Ascension Day. The procession was usually called the Rogation Procession, so-called because people walking in procession were supposed to sing litanies of special supplication. First came the cross bearer in surplice and cassock, carrying the cross. Then followed little girls attired in white, carrying baskets of flowers which they strewed along the procession route. The priest followed attired in sacerdotal robes of dignity, carrying the Blessed Sacrament, and overhead was the canopy carried by four men. Following the priest came the choir members singing hymns. Next were the women of the parish praying the rosary in unison and they in turn were followed by the men.

The procession marched along the highway to the nearest wayside chapel or shrine where Benediction was said, after



This wayside chapel is located on the Joseph Naze farm at Rosiere. Processions often ended at the chapel.

Photo by Math S.
Tlachac

which the procession returned to the church. The coming of the automobile made highway travel dangerous and such processions were discontinued and held on church grounds or within the church.

Ward Off Demon

The first Sunday of Lent was usually a significant one to the Belgians. Another custom brought with them to America was that of carrying straw into an open field, making a pile and then lighting it when darkness came. The fire was supposed to ward off the demon and to remind the people that the season of Lent had arrived, when personal sacrifices and fasting were good for the soul. Like other customs, this one, too, has passed away and is no longer remembered by the present young Belgian generation.

When a Belgian was elected to some town office, a maypole was erected in his honor by his neighbors. A tall balsam was

cut, the bark was peeled, leaving a top of branches to which were tied colored strips of cotton ribbons. The elected official then furnished the crowd assembled with a keg of beer in appreciation of the honor bestowed upon him. Sometimes the local

school teacher was so honored with a may-pole planted near the schoolhouse in which he was teaching, and this also cost him the price of a keg of beer. Likewise, this custom has passed away.

PART X

POLITICAL INFLUENCE OF BELGIANS WAS SLOW DEVELOPING, BUT, NOT THEIR SELF-RELIANCE; WILLIAM MOORE ELECTED FIRST BRUSSELS TOWN CHAIRMAN IN 1859.

For several years the Belgians were ignored by people in other parts of the country. No help was given them in their poverty and distress and they received no assistance in building roads, schools or other benefits from a tax-supported government. Living by themselves in a deep forest and unable to speak with people from other parts of the country, they were looked upon as being of little or no account. Neither had they learned to exercise their right of suffrage.

But eventually this situation came to an end thru the energy of one of the early pioneers of Aux premiers Belges, by the name of Xavier Martin.

As a member of one of the original families, he came to America in 1853. He stopped in Philadelphia for a few years, where he learned the English language. He was a very intelligent and capable young man and when in 1857 he came to visit his relatives in Aux premiers Belges (Bay Settlement) he was persuaded to remain as a school teacher. The settlers were then already talking about schools where their children could receive an education and young Xavier Martin seemed to be just the person they needed.

After seeing the indifference with which his countrymen were being treated by a few older Americans, Martin went around among the leading Belgian pioneers and explained to them the American system of government. Said Martin, "You are now American citizens and by going to the polls and voting unitedly, you can take control of local governmental affairs."

This suggestion met with wholesome reception and when election time came around, a slate of Belgian candidates for the various township offices was drawn up. Martin was a modest man, but not too modest. He did not ask for all of the offices, for he knew to be town chairman or

supervisor of the town was a thankless job and full of criticism. Nor was it any pleasure to be assessor or treasurer because both of these offices were concerned with taxes – then, as now, a sore subject.

He, therefore, contented himself with claiming the office of clerk, superintendent of schools and justice of the peace. The first was a necessity because he was the only Belgian who could speak and write English. The second office he sought because he was a school teacher who was interested in education. The office of justice of the peace was the most dignified of the local offices and his desire to keep it so was his reason for seeking it.

230 Voters Appear

Most Belgians lived as far as 10 miles from the polling place. On the appointed day, candidates of different nationalities were dumbfounded to see an army approaching 230 voters in number coming to the polls. Needless to say, when the votes were tabulated, it was found that every Belgian candidate was elected. After that, the Belgians from Bay Settlement to Sturgeon Bay had control and managed their own affairs, for news of the coup in Bay Settlement spread very rapidly. But after a few years, a number of sawmills were erected in different parts of the settlement.

The companies which owned the mills were great destroyers of timber in the 20 year period after the Civil War. They were not interested in the future welfare of the district whose timber they were slashing down and resisted the levying of taxes for schools and highways by every possible means. At election time, they set up a slate of their own candidates for the various offices. These candidates were pledged to carry out the wishes of the lumber bosses.

On election day, the mills closed down

and every mill hand was instructed to vote for the mill candidates or else look for a different job. Tables were set up at polling places where beer and hard liquor were freely dispensed to all who would accept the ticket backed by the mill. The mills also had their set of a half-dozen husky fighters whose business it was to intimidate the opposition and destroy its tickets or spread falsehood about their opposing candidates. By threats, free drinks and violence these lumber companies usually managed to control the elections and escape their share of taxes towards the development of the community. Eventually state laws were passed prohibiting such practices.

By 1858, there were enough settlers in Brussels to form a township. At the February meeting of the Door county board in 1858, Brussels was set off as a township and the board resolved that the town should be organized by holding a town election the first Tuesday in April, 1858. However, Brussels was not organized until 1859 when an election was held in the store of Michael Smith in Sugar Creek. At the time Brussels was made a township, it covered the territory of Union and Gardner. The latter two were organized into townships at a later date.

Moore First Chairman

William Moore was the first town chairman of the newly organized township of Brussels, in 1859. Others succeeding him until the turn of the century were:

In 1860, H.J. Sorensen; 1861, Francois Pierre; 1862-1863, M.S. Schmidt; 1864-1869, Jos Colignon; 1870, John Moore; 1871-1872, Adrian Francois; 1873-1878, Alexis Frank; 1879, John Moore; 1880-1881, Felix Englebert; 1882, Alexander

Meunier; 1883, Desire Englebert; 1884-1885, William Moore; 1886, Felix Englebert; 1887-1889, William Moore, 1890-1893, Louis Bassine; 1894-1897, Desire Englebert; 1898-1901, Louis Bassine; 1902, Desire Englebert.

Some of the persons who served the township as treasurer in those early years were 1872, D. F. Gilson; 1874-1878, E. Vangindertalean (Vandertie); 1879-1880, D.F. Gilson; 1881-1882, Jos. Francois; 1884-1885, D.F. Gilson; 1886-1893, Eugene Naze.

Research did not come up with the names of persons who served as town clerk, assessor or supervisors. If to any reader of this installment there appears to be loopholes in vacant dates, it is because records were poorly kept for posterity in those days or have been lost or misplaced.

This concludes the history of the Belgian settlement. As in other historical articles published in the local media, there was considerable research work done to make the history as authentic as was possible.

The courage and self-reliance of these Belgian settlers were, indeed, remarkable. These pathfinders were an exceptionally hardy lot of individuals whose energy, optimism and self-reliance made them look upon hardship as a challenge in a new country.

The principles used to guide their personal life were also applied to their various enterprises. What a contrast it is today with so many demands on the government for aid of every kind! Those people did not ask: "What can the government do for me," but, rather, gave of themselves in helping to develop the country.

